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10 February 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR: ███████████

SUBJECT: Item Register

The unique identification of items is a necessary
(if not sufficient) condition for three different types
of activity: (a) current operations, especially of document
and information handling systems, (b) system design, and
(c) the management of resources. Such identification goes
on throughout the community now, but problems exist in the
efficiency of the processes and in the capability of manage-
ment to use the identification in connection with system
design and the management of resources.

a. <u>Current operations</u>: In those units whose job
it is to service customers by identifying documents needed
and then obtaining them, (for example, units in the Document
Division and the CIA Library), the proliferation of intelli-
gence information-bearing series of documents with similar
titles or other identifying features imposes a burden by
requiring those units to create or maintain cross-reference
files, produce or utilize a variety of catalogs, and provide
for long and expensive on-the-job training before their
professionals can perform their duties adequately. Such
units must first find out from their customers just what they
want, and then must phrase the request in terms of the local
system from which the document must be borrowed. The existence
of "popular" titles which are similar for different series
makes this a time-consuming problem. For example, many
different intelligence organizations and organizational
elements produce series of items called: Information Reports,
Technical Reports, Daily Reports, Intelligence Reviews,
Intelligence Digests, etc. Standing alone, such titles are
ambiguous. In practice some of these are amplified by the
addition of producer's name, e.g., Defense Intelligence
Digest; and/or frequency of issuance such as Weekly Intelli-
gence Digest (PACOM); or category as is the case with the
Scientific Intelligence Digest (OSI/CIA); or general purpose
such as Current Intelligence Digest (OCI/CIA), Counterintelligence
Digest (USAFE and PACAF), and Weekly Counterintelligence Summary
(USAFE & PACAF).

In some instances, even these amplifications do not
suffice in providing unique identifications. In the case of
Information Reports, a series designation in addition to

producing agency is found to be desirable. For example,
designation of Information Reports produced by CIA as
OOA's, OOB's, CS's, etc. The same is true for NSA's Elint
Reports which are also given unique series identification.

A final example is the issuance from time to time
of sanitized versions of a given document wherein the
releasability statement may be the most apparent, if not
the only, indication of different content in two otherwise
identically titled and identified series. Similar problems
arise in identifying documents issued at different security
levels which, if treated as a single series, give rise to
confusion and possible inadvertent disclosure.

In each of these cases unique identification can
be and is made - but only by obtaining more descriptive elements
than the mere title. If the customer does not know these
elements, a dead-end may result. If he does but must be
queried again, extra work is the result. These units through-
out the community are doing their job under these circumstances,
but only by creating files and fostering expertise which in
effect bring into being dozens of miniature "item registers"
in many organizations. The need therefore exists for some
centralized assistance (as in the proposed Item Register
System) which can conserve manpower, expertise and time by
eliminating at least some of the need for many auxiliary
files and for such a long training period. Almost every unit
throughout the community dealing with this problem is obliged
to creat "snag" files or "authority" files to help them iden-
tify what the customer wants and then to express this identi-
fication in the terms needed by another unit which might have
the item. A large number of "catalogs" or "item lists" have
been created by producing organizations, both for management
purposes and to aid in this identification process. A list of
some of these catalogs can be found in Appendix 3 of the Task
Team II report. The combined coverage of these "catalogs" is
not complete, however, and they use different formats,
different elements of information, and different methods of
representation, thus increasing the difficulty of using them
for the identification problem. The publication, in 1957 and
1959, of CODIB's Union List of Intelligence Serial Publications
(Union List) represented a partial answer to this problem. The
usefulness of this publication is still attested by the dog-
eared copies used every day in many processing units; the
limitations are indicated by the vast number of additions and
notes pencilled into these copies. The Union List was not
fully comprehensive, and it was not dynamic. An Item Register
system would be both. Furthermore, the Item Register would
provide an unclassified, unique identifying number for each

intelligence item by which it could be differentiated from all other intelligence items regardless of title or other similarity. This unique number would provide the "handle" by which these items could be referenced in unclassified messages or telephone conversations. In that regard it would be similar in usage to the Bombing Encyclopedia Number (BENO) assigned to installations as recommended in the Task Team IV report.

      b. <u>System design</u>: Identification is necessary for system design and information exchange as well as for document borrowing and dissemination. Here the need is to describe efficiently, simply, and accurately the inclusion and exclusion of information content in a given file or information system, operational or under design. An example of this need is the fact that CIA's CHIVE designers have so far found it necessary to expend over 90 man-days in an effort to itemize series for Communist China so that selection criteria, inclusion and exclusion decisions and other design decisions can be made. This list, for one country only, is only one-shot, however, and will have to be updated continually either during development or operation of the new system. An Item Register System can be of considerable assistance to Project CHIVE for areas of the world to be implemented <u>after</u> China.

      c. <u>Management of resources</u>: Not until we can accurately and definitively describe the scope and content of our information systems can we hope to have more useful inter-change between systems. Neither can we usefully identify and eliminate duplication of information processing until we have a means of item identification on a common or comparable basis. Since many document series contain information on a variety of subjects and areas, and can be used by organizations doing a variety of functional tasks in the community, accurate and definitive inventories of such document series plus the ability to divide the total into meaningful classes are needed when managers consider how to "assign responsibility" for informa-tion processing.

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